

**U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT  
FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTE**

**ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:  
OVERSEAS SPECIAL EDUCATION WORKSHOP**

**SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES**

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**THURSDAY, MAY 28, 2009**

*Transcript by  
Federal News Service  
Washington, D.C.*

HEATHER DICKMEYER: I'm Heather Dickmeyer. I'm with the Family Liaison Office. And the Family Liaison Office, FLO, does advocacy programs and services. We work with family members and employees in several different areas. I do education in youth. As Dan mentioned, we're doing a lot with unaccompanied tour support for family members. We have an expeditious naturalization person who helps foreign-born spouses expedite their naturalization if they're in the States for a short time.

We have a crisis-management person, Naomi Ritchie. I think some of you already know her. She has been with us 5 years and she handles divorce, evacuation and other family crises. We also manage the CLO program overseas and we have a coordinator for that program and we have five people working on employment issues for eligible family members overseas.

As I say, my work is education and youth. And sometimes people ask me, what do you do exactly? (Laughter.) And if I give you a list, if we play "20 Questions," the game of, what do you think of when you think of education in the Foreign Service or related to the Foreign Service or moving back to the U.S. or what do you think of when you think of youth, the chances are that my office has something to do with it.

I think a good analogy, if you'd look at the other offices that are represented here today – because we coordinate with ECS; we coordinate with med; we coordinate with the Office of Overseas Schools; we coordinate with allowances – is I'm sort of like the GP. And they are the specialists.

You know, you go to them when you need the heart surgery. They are very specialized; they are trained experts in certain fields. And they can really give you expert advice on the schools overseas or your child's special needs or allowances. But we answer questions in all of those areas. And sometimes you will only have to talk to us if you're looking for general information. But you can spend your whole career in the Foreign Service and never, ever talk to FLO. There is no requirement that you contact FLO. You don't have to get our signature before you have your bid approved or to make sure that you're receiving an allowance. You can get information from us about that, but there is no requirement; we're not part of that system.

If I had to say, in a nutshell, what I do in relation to education and youth, it is to bring to it the background of having done this for many years; I'm a Foreign Service spouse. We'll celebrate 25 years next month in the Foreign Service; 18 of them overseas, raising two children, one of them was special needs. And it is a wonderful life, but it is a life with many challenges and FLO exists to help you through those challenges in whatever way we can.

And I think raising a child requires a communal network that sometimes breaks down when we're transferring and when we're moving overseas. And so we're a resource that exists throughout your career. And you may be in touch with ECS for years before you ever, every call FLO. And you may never – you know, so there is no required point of entry. If you think you

have a child with special needs, you can talk to me first. Eventually I will probably point you to ECS, but you can talk to me.

So I think that's one thing – when we met to talk about this today, we wanted to make sure that everyone knew that there is no – there are certain steps to receive the special needs education allowance, but you can start with anybody in the room that you're hearing speak today. Any one of us will help us; any one of us will direct you to the place that you need to go, if we can't help you.

I am hoping as – we don't have a lot of time today, but I am hoping that you'll get a chance to think about what you're doing right because there really – working within the structure of the Foreign Service, there is no one right answer; there are many ways to raise children and there are many solutions. And there is a lot that you're doing right. And I hope that you'll have a chance to think about some things you might want to do differently. And I hope too that you'll see my office as a resource that you can use. But, please, if you have any questions –

Because – I'm trying to think on time how this is going to work. Well, let me hear from you. I want to talk about transition because I would say that 80 percent of the phone calls, e-mails that I receive are related to transition for special needs children, for any child. That is the difficult point in the Foreign Service. What works when you're in the same environment over a number of years where the teachers know your children, where they know the environment, where they know the language, it doesn't work when you're moving.

So although the Foreign Service is wonderful, that is what we deal with and that is what you need to focus on when you're planning for all of your children – special needs or otherwise – in terms of preparing for that transition.

And I guess – can you write down – I just would like to hear from some of you about some of the transition issues that you think are important.

Q: One of the things that I've noticed coming back here, it seems like when you go overseas, if you're at post, it's easier to find the resources because they're very limited so you know what they are. Here there are so many of them – how do you filter down what you need and how can you get, you know, you have to drive all the way around the Beltway or it could be right in your area? You really have to ask everybody all of these questions and make friends in the community. And it's – I think it's harder to transition back to here than it is to go overseas with a special needs kid or anything.

MS. DICKMEYER: Very important point. I think there are two that you touched on: re-entry, absolutely the hardest transition in the Foreign Service. And sometimes, if you look at the culture shock cycle, which is usually an average of six months, it can be a year or more.

Q: A year to find an OT that we trust. (Laughter.) We have tons of them.

MS. DICKMEYER: (Chuckles.) Trust, yep, no, exactly. And you thought you were coming to the land of, wow, OTs on every corner, highly qualified – yeah. So that's part of our

culture shock is misperceptions about what the U.S. offers. But I think the other thing is getting information. That's one of the problems with the transition – overseas or back to the U.S.

Yeah, you had your hand up.

Q: Adding onto your thought about finding a good OT, we had a big struggle finding an OT or a child social worker or somebody who took our insurance. (Inaudible, off mike) – 6 months – (inaudible). And then, once we found a person, at least the few that we found that do take insurance, might not be top-notch or they might have a huge waiting list. Yeah, so that's been challenging. I mean, out of pocket, I think our psychiatrist does not take BlueCross. That's the thing. Every week, a couple of hundred dollars out of pocket.

MS. DICKMEYER: So finances, yeah. And this is, again, re-entry, specifically Washington area.

Q: What is the – for parents, what is, then, the best insurance that you've found or just in, you know, talking to other parents? Because BlueCross, I would think –

Q: One of the best things we ever did at the advice of another Foreign Service family was switch to Kaiser Permanente when we came back closer to D.C. We have a Foreign Service plan when we're overseas and we switched to Kaiser when we came back. And that was before our special needs child was born.

They – I mean, I am not a paid representative of Kaiser – (laughter) – but, basically, especially when you have – my oldest two kids were the only kids we had had; it didn't really matter. I mean, we liked our physician; we didn't really care. But then our special needs child was born in 2006 with significant medical issues. She probably had the most expensive surgery known to man at Johns Hopkins a year-and-a-half ago. And Kaiser never blinked an eye.

They've also been wonderful, wonderful, wonderful about paying for all of her developmental needs with her ST, OT and PT even when they're not considered an in-network provider.

Just explore other options as far as your insurance. I mean, Kaiser has worked wonderful for us, but there are plenty of things they don't pay for. They don't give her orthotics. So orthotics are out of pocket but, compared to the million-dollar surgery, I'll pay for the \$500 orthotics. So just sort of think about that as a strategy for insurance, is when you're back in the States, maybe you want to look for a different plan.

You can always remember that it's not – there are reasons why you can create your own open season; you aren't bound to the normal, regular federal government open season for purposes of switching insurance. The birth of a dependent is one personal open season; switching coasts beyond like 30 miles is another open season. So you don't have to stay on the same insurance

Q: One other comment about Kaiser is when a child has a certain level of complexity or severity, they shunt you to a system where they give you a pediatric case manager.

Q: Essentially your own insurance social worker.

Q: Your own insurance social worker. And what happens is, when you're averaging four or five, six or more appointments a week, there is one phone number, one person who always answers your calls who churns out referrals for you, who faxes them to your doctor, who keeps track of everything and follows your child's development. It's just amazing.

Q: We were here for a year before we switched and just trying to find a pediatrician for our normal kids was a nightmare and then it was all processing the insurance afterwards. I mean, I can't imagine what we would have done had we not just happened to switch before I even was pregnant with our special needs child. But it's been quite the lesson.

MS. DICKMEYER: Thank you. This is excellent information. Someone has had her hand up over here for a while.

Q: Just back on re-entry, you know, dealing with the public school system, I've heard a few people refer to consultants. Where would we find a list of consultants? I mean, that would be something that I could probably come to your office for, if you had one. And, if not, can you prepare a list of consultants that bring recommendations to people who can use them? And which ones are better in which public school systems? Because it took us 2 years to get our daughter's problem diagnosed because in the re-entry they do everything in-house – the psychoeducational. And they didn't know our child. And they relied on the teachers who didn't know our child more than, you know – (inaudible).

MS. DICKMEYER: So you're looking for psychoeducational testing professionals, basically?

Q: Testing professionals and –

Q: Advocates. You're looking for advocates.

Q: If this is not covered, we need to know that; we need to have someone to go to like you that says, you know, these are the ones that do these services. And ECS helps with that, too. But then, you know, with the caveat that oftentimes it's not covered and you didn't check your insurance.

And then the second thing is these consultants who actually advocate for you, to have a list of them ready for people who are going to need them.

MS. DICKMEYER: Advocating for in the public schools?

Q: Right, because, usually, you find out – (inaudible, cross talk).

Q: (Inaudible, off mike) – the people who will advocate with the public schools – (inaudible) – psychotherapist and your psychiatrist; you haven't even gotten those people on board yet because you are still at the stage of diagnosing it.

MS. DICKMEYER: Okay, a couple of different things here. Okay, I don't want to not answer your question, but I think – we have a wonderful resource here because Diana Rooney worked in the Fairfax County Parent Resource Center.

DIANA ROONEY: Yeah, I would say, look at what's free first. And I worked at the Fairfax County public schools' Parent Resource Center. And what they can provide for free –

Q: Take it.

MS. ROONEY: Is huge. They are resources; they are not going to be your personal advocate. There are 26,000 kids in that county receiving special-needs services.

Q: What I'm saying is that FLO can recommend to you. (Laughter.)

MS. DICKMEYER: Well, she is working in crisis management now. This is –

MS. ROONEY: I'm working in FLO now.

MS. DICKMEYER: But I think her point is that there are resources through the public schools. Outside the school, they do offer some services. I think the other point is that it is very frustrating to get your child placed and get effective services in the public school. And it usually takes some time even if they have a pre-existing diagnosis.

Q: This is a list. Some services out there – (inaudible, off mike) – consult for free, but there is just –

MS. DICKMEYER: I'm going to – I'll tell you that we have – and this is a hard one because we don't want – we can't really recommend anyone. And I don't know how you do this, Anne (sp), but we can tell you who other parents have told us they have used. And it's not a published list and it's not – and, you know, the other thing we look for, too, is someone who understands the unique configuration of the Foreign Service and third-culture kids and how that plays into it, too.

So if we have a list that we'll just put out there because, you know, we really don't want to be in the business of giving business – appearing to be endorsing anyone's services. But we can tell you who other parents have used without any –

MS. ROONEY: Anybody can be an advocate, and that's kind of scary. So you need to be really careful when you hire somebody to go into the school on your behalf.

MS. DICKMEYER: And there are certain professional qualifications that you can look for, and I can tell you about those. But, Stan, I don't know how your office handles that.

STAN PIOTROSKI: We'll make the recommendation for an educational consultant. So if – we use several individuals who have been just terrific and we'll give you their names today. These are terrific educational consultants. So – and like Heather was saying, you know, we don't say go to the – (inaudible); go to this group, go to that group, but these are all good people, credentialed people who – we recommend your consideration for any one of these people, but we have that information for you.

MS. DICKMEYER: Does that answer your – because there were any number of questions. But, okay, so but I do think the difficulties of getting effective services in public schools – or, it takes time, basically. It's usually – there's usually a delay, and if you're here for a year or even 2 years, that could be a very significant delay for your child. So yes?

MR. PIOTROSKI (?): (Inaudible, off mike.) We get pretty good – (inaudible) – as far as – (inaudible).

MS. DICKMEYER: Oh, yeah. Okay.

MR. PIOTROSKI (?): Now, there have been a couple of – (inaudible, off mike).

MS. DICKMEYER: Okay, yes.

Q: Yeah, we're also on Medicaid with the – (inaudible) – waiver, so that's – (inaudible). Medicaid.

MS. DICKMEYER: Yeah. I highly recommend you looking into that, some of you, yeah. Okay.

Q: (Inaudible.)

MS. DICKMEYER: Medicaid.

Q: No, it's not income-dependent at all. It's on the disability of your child.

MS. DICKMEYER: Another question?

Q: Back to re-entry and taking time, when you start school, they won't offer except your existing IEP, I mentioned this to someone else; Fairfax County would not take my daughter's overseas IEP, they have to go through, in all it takes 65 days, and in the meantime, she's put in normal classes, which is very detrimental to her learning, you know.

MS. DICKMEYER: Yeah. And there are a few shortcuts they can do – a summer, they can go into a summer program before they start school, and there are – (inaudible, cross talk).

Q: Well, we arrived mid-school-year.

MS. DICKMEYER: Yeah, so. And that is –

Q: That's hard.

MS. DICKMEYER: Yeah, that's a very difficult one, and I think this gets into – up to a point it is that you have to do some planning in terms of how many of these disruptions you'll have, and if you're making that transition to Washington –

Q: We dealt with planning foods – (inaudible).

MS. DICKMEYER: Right, so – (chuckles) – yeah, okay. How is she – well, anyway that's – okay. How long have you been here?

Q: Two months.

MS. DICKMEYER: Two months. So okay, are there any other comments on – what else goes into transition that any – what other factors? We don't even have culture shock – well, we have – (inaudible), but we don't have culture shock, and I mean we covered it, but – (chuckles) – it wasn't making it sound like you weren't keep the list, sorry.

MS. : Here's a handout to give them.

MR. : There's one factor you might add up there, that for those that come back that are Foreign Service employees, getting time away from the new job to actually go tracking it down, having a supervisor who's perhaps not as aware of those issues can be a concern, or fear of saying, I need to go take care of my child, oh, we've got this visit coming in, you know.

MS. : We've never had a single parent – (inaudible) – a single parent is just so hard.

MR. : It is – it can be a concern.

MS. DICKMEYER: Okay, so supervisor – yeah, supervisor awareness – I don't know, and what is – what is – are they required to give time – if it's –

MS. : Yes. I mean, you're – I mean, I'm just going to speak for working with managers, there's the constraints of the job, and I hear somebody talking about a visit coming up and all that, and supervisors are supposed to give you time – you know, you're allowed to use sick leave for the care of your child, and if worst comes to worst, get – get – apply for the Family Medical Leave Act, which I've had to do, I actually had to do.

Q: Well, when you're brand new on the job, that's pretty hard to do –

MS. : What, I'm sorry?

Q: When you're brand new on the job, it's –



MS. : But it's a federal law, so you should be able to –

MR. : Supervisor will be unhappy about that –

MS. : Yeah, oh, yeah – (laughter) – they can still be unhappy, that's right.

MS. DICKMEYER: So has everyone done their no-fear training that shows what you – yeah – that's what it – yeah. So you –

MR. : Depending upon – I'm sorry – depending upon how much – (inaudible) – possible for HR to step in and make special arrangements, extra time for your client, to make up for time.

MS. DICKMEYER: They can do that, yeah. So there's things that can – yeah. But it is – there is the legal side, and then there's just the difficulties of managing your career in relation to your child's needs, yeah. Okay, so managing career, which is a whole topic, no? (Chuckles.) Somebody else? Yes.

MS. : I think what I'm trying to say is because this was on me, I called your office, I had to. It was the hardest re-entry, and all the lists are sort of like, oops! I never should have had this list, and everyone one of them is more than – for instance, for me, you're given – (inaudible) – to pack in and out, that means out of your post. But packing in, my husband, Liftig (ph), kind of walked his way through the boxes, and I have them in every room up to here and he never came back. (Laughter.) So things like that.

So I think what happens is that we wracked our brains about – because I was out for seven years before, overseas – we're going to get our admin – (inaudible); we're going to get whatever and they just don't fall in place. And that's the part about re-entry that's just really – you know, you go to the CRO Office and you're giving away the store. You know, this woman loves the – (inaudible) – or speaks English or is in your neighborhood. And I think that's the whole thing, is that we're so used, in the Foreign Service, we go to one center, and then here you're sort of running around and patch working together.

MS. DICKMEYER: We lose our support network when we come back here, and when we think we're coming home and where people are like us and where so many services – but particularly in Washington, people are very busy. Schools are very busy. There just is – very much, there's a bottom line that –

MS. : And I'll give you a small detail that doesn't sideline me, is that when I walked in by myself to this school, she told me, well, we're going to have to give him immigration status because you've been out so many years. (Laughter.) And I said – (inaudible, laughter). We leave in three days. So oh, my gosh, I'm only done three weeks, I capped it at a few more days, I got a lawyer, you see, and – (inaudible). Otherwise, I would still be – (inaudible) – so I was going to say, there's nothing they can throw on you. They want to give you immigrant status –

MS. DICKMEYER: What school system is it?

MS. : Montgomery Country.

MS. DICKMEYER: Oh, that's very interesting, because they are very aware of Foreign Service.

MS. : And then, when I came back with a lawyer, they like in three seconds were like, oh, you should have told us.

MS. : We found this old IP – old ID number – (inaudible) – and pulled it out of a hat and he was in in 48 hours. (Inaudible) – to get a lawyer, but it was just such a shock to me, part of re-entry, you see.

MS. DICKMEYER: And that's another – okay, re-entry, is really an important one. Legalistic. Even though you don't have as many services overseas, you're not always dealing with a legal bottom-line. You're dealing with, what does the school want to do, what can we do to help your child? And a lot of times, what you hit when you get back here is very much, this is what we're required to do. So there was a hand up.

Q: I just want to say in that vein that I think one of the things to do is just to create your support system as quickly as possible, and I think one of the best things to do is to go into the – because when you lose it, where do you go? And the community you live in, people who live there, people who have been there for a while, because I found an advocate in the public-school system through a friend in the community. You just start talking to people, network, network, network.

MS. DICKMEYER: And the yahoo! groups, not only the special-needs groups but the FS parents. You can get a lot of resources there that would help with your special-needs child or with other children in your family. I mean, it's always – that is very much an advice network, so not everyone's experience will be – it is about their experience and not necessarily what your experience will be, but it's a great resource and it's a way in. So that's – anything else? So okay.

So who is – I mean, we talked – if we go back to the doctor analogy, and we've got the GP and we've got all these specialists, who is the leader of the team? I mean, it's really – through all this process, it is the parent, and when I hear all of what you're saying, that you're talking about what you know about your child and how you know what they will need and what – you know how they act when they're happy, you know how they act when they're disturbed. You know what makes them tick, and you're going to be the only one through this entire process who has that information.

And no matter how good their records are from their departing school and no matter how good a school you're going into, their ability to help your child is only going to be as good as the information that you give and the work that you put into placing them. And I think this is really true overseas, and I hope overseas schools and ECS and won't take this wrong, but I think if Bill

Scotti tells you that this school and this post accommodates special needs or if Dan (ph) says, we will approve a bid for this post, that's not your endpoint; that's your starting point.

That's when your work begins, and it's not easy. But there are schools that will take your child and that are known to have services, but it might not be the right mix socially. If they're isolated from the rest of the students, if no one else in the student population speaks English as their first language, or most of them don't, how is that going to work for your kid? And it may very well. It may be something that works, but it's information you'll want, because what they're letting you know if that educational services are adequate for your child there.

There are also going to be some cases where there are schools that may not work. I know a wonderful story of a child who had mild learning differences but some physical limitations as well. And his parents contacted the school that did not have any access for his limitations.

And they reviewed – the panel reviewed his application and said, we can handle his learning differences, this is how we'll handle it. We need to make some of these modifications to our physical plant, anyway, and they're very minor. You know, it's a one-story school; it's not going to be that expensive.

But our concern is that we have never, ever had a child with this kind of limitations in our school before. How is it going to work for him to be here? And the school went to the child's grade, and they said, what do you think – will you welcome this child? And they voted and they welcomed him and he had a great experience in that school.

And that's an outcome that you'll never get if you just work through those of us in the State Department, because we don't know your child and, in this case, the parents could say, my child adapts very well socially, he embraces social challenges, that's not part of his issue. So they were able – the school had the information they needed. And so sometimes there are going to be schools that can help that, maybe on paper, can't. And Stan will sign off on that, right? (Chuckles.) So you're really in the driver's seat on it, it is a big responsibility but you have a lot of support that's available.

I want to move on before – because they are a couple of issues that come up. Can you flip to the next page? Oh, we already did our transition one, go ahead. (Chuckles.) Okay. Here's what gives us trouble. Denial is, especially if your child has been in one school for a few years and his accommodations are being met, it's easy to believe that he's outgrown it or it wasn't as bad as you thought it was. And just always assume that it's there.

And there are some cases when kids move through different stages, adolescence as they mature, that their needs will change. So that may happen. But for the most part, when you're moving don't assume that everything's okay. Assume the worst. And I really – this is very important – because if the incoming school has all the incoming information that you can provide about your child, in many cases, they will say, yes, we'll take this child. But if they don't have full information – and the same way you talk about it being difficult to get services in a U.S. public school for six months, your child is going to have three to six months in the school before somebody starts to say, hey, wait a minute, something's not right here.

So just assume that there's an issue and maybe all will go smoothly. But guilt – if I had a vote, if there's an emotion that we could expunge, it's parent guilt. It does no good and it keeps us dwelling on things we can't do anything about. What guilt about, did we cause our children's special needs somehow? But I think if they came out tomorrow and said, autism was caused by champagne in the first trimester of pregnancy and ADD was caused by 60 years of Sesame Street in the first 2 years of life – it's a done deal.

I mean it's done and you made the best decisions. I don't think that's going to make. I mean it's absolutely – it does no good. And you want to live in the future. And sometimes guilt will make us make bad decisions. And I think the other guilt we have is about being in the Foreign Service. What am I doing to my child? And how could I do this?

And I think we forget, sometimes, that if we weren't in the Foreign Service things wouldn't be perfect either and that there're challenges that we would be facing if we here in the States. And so there's a tradeoff. And there are some services available in terms of the financial support for special needs, the types of services available – if you ever get around to thinking that a boarding school might be a good option when you're posted overseas. Wow. I mean to get a boarding school education paid for courtesy of the U.S. government to make sure that your child has the best education – that's a much better outcome than you're going to get from a public school in the U.S.

So there are some ups and downs to the Foreign Service but put it in balance. Yes?

Q: Speaking of ups and downs in the Foreign Service, I've been trying to do some research and find out if anybody has done any studies on children in a certain environment when you're moving and the only thing I've found was that a few studies documenting low-income kids, I think, moving around the United States. And it did affect them emotionally and educationally. But I haven't found anything on this lifestyle. Does anybody know?

MS. ROONEY: There's very, very little. I've looked for it too. And there is very little hard research. And you can't get data either. I've asked the Department over the years to give me information about, you know, outcomes for kids and so forth. And they still keep it. It's not that they're necessarily hiding it. They just have never gathered that kind of information. And I mean, there is literature that Ruth Useem came out with from Michigan State University. She started research in the '50s and so forth on Third Culture kids. But as far as hard research, there's very, very little unfortunately. I wish somebody would do it.

MS. DICKMEYER: There's a wealth of literature on Third Culture kids and I've left a handout out there. It's just a very short and general handout on transition issues. Not geared towards special needs. But it does reference a couple of resources, some good books that are helpful to read. And just to think about, one, for us to think about how our kids are different than us as a result of growing up in multiple cultures. You know, sometimes we forget that they're not the same animal we are. (Chuckles.) And so that's got some general resources in it. And I assume Pam's going to talk about – Office of Overseas Schools has a couple of wonderful

resources: transitioning with your – yeah – and those are much more – as I said, that's expert opinion, mine's just general advice.

MS. ROONEY: No, there's some very good general information. As a social scientist, it, sort of, is irritating to me that there has not been any kind of really serious research done. There it is.

Q: Even with military families and – (inaudible) – kids, you know, Army brats?

MS. DICKMEYER: That would be, yeah, you'd think there would be. Their culture tends to be different because they have, they go – for the most – they move from large military base to large military base so they have their own subculture. They have the issues of grief and impermanence but they don't tend to, as much as our kids, have that sense of personal rootlessness. They have geographical rootlessness, but they don't have quite as strong an identity issue problem as our kids get and can sometimes but –

MS. : I don't imagine their kids would be put into an immigration track either. (Laughter.)

MS. DICKMEYER: Well, that's another point you make is that there are legal considerations in place for military that don't apply to Foreign Service. And you'll find when you get around to applying for colleges and in-state tuition and da, da, da, da, and that is one of – FLO doesn't do legal advocacy but we work with other offices that can. But to see if we can have some of the same benefits that they military – recognition in the system that the military has. It's hard, in part, because we're such a small group. And you'll find that services at the college level, for instance, in terms of getting in-state tuition recognized in Virginia and Maryland is much more than it is in Utah, simply because there are so many Foreign Service people in this area.

It may not be automatic but it happens. But there is a discrepancy. And it's hard to address, just because we are such a tiny group. We don't fit in anybody's bill – they're taking the Congress. So what else? Anything else? It seemed like there was another hand up there. Anyway, her materials are very helpful. And you mentioned something, I think the other big fear and the big question mark has to do with how it affects your career. And it absolutely – I have to tell you – it never occurred to me that it would be a bidding issue from the standpoint of post.

I mean in terms of – we hear it more on the other side that parents who are frustrated because they can't do their first choice. That they would like to go to this post and they feel that's hampering their career not to be able to go but, I guess, in part because management officers don't make the decisions for a lot of positions at post about who's coming. And they're the ones who worry about the money most. (Chuckles.) But I'm sure it happens. But it's just a new insight into the difficulties that you faced with you –

Q: I'm going to ask you a question. I mean, after 4 years at a post I just got a thick skin. I don't know how it got out but, why don't you answer this? We pay and the minute I walked

through the office, the representatives and the guy upstairs, you know, I said, well, you know, my kids have special needs, he first tells me, ma'am, we have like four of your families here. And I thought, oops, we're not in the United States anymore. So that was a very tasteless thing to say. And it continued – in the cafeteria and people knew me. I mean they didn't know me, but they knew I was the kid, you know, with the kid. And they used to say things like, why is the Down's family here?

And this what – I thought it was a medical, private issue. I mean I guess, that's when you say here, just I'm getting really uncomfortable like – I want to be a diplomatic corps, a person at the post, I want to be all those things who incidentally has a child. But it's mind-boggling to say what –

MS. DICKMEYER: Absolutely.

(Cross talk.)

Q: But it's fear. I think that's also another one that I wanted you to think about on a social level.

MS. DICKMEYER: Where do you think the breakdown came from, at the school's level?

Q: I have no idea. No, he was enjoying public school.

MS. DICKMEYER: Okay, so it was –

Q: I just thought maybe this would be something that, you know, whenever I talked to people in the medical unit at the post, they would leak it out – because it becomes one of these strange things –

MS. DICKMEYER: Yeah, I think, I mean, medical confidentiality is so strict –

(Cross talk.)

MS. DICKMEYER: But it obviously came from somewhere but I don't think it would be the medical unit.

MS. : I would have the tendency to report that myself. If I was – I would report that.

MS. : Once every three months I would think about reporting that it to Washington because it really, it began to bother me.

MS. DICKMEYER: Oh, absolutely. It's awful.

MR. : I wish Ambassador Likens to hear that because that's something that's unacceptable.

MS. : It is unacceptable.

MR. : And I can tell you one thing right now, that if a child with special needs, severe, moderate, mild, is in a school, I believe that the other children benefit from that child. We had a handicapped child on a wheelchair, the child had such a beautiful spirit about her, always smiling, you know, those children really learned a lot from her. I think if a child has a disability, I think other children really are able to learn, because not everybody's "normal." (Laughter.)

MS. DICKMEYER: And what's normal, anyway?

MR. : Go back into the world; look at the real world; go in the streets, you'll see. So I mean, I think it's to the benefit of the other kids to learn, it's a learning experience for them.

MS. : Bill (ph), I just – just when you say "fear," there was one thing I was going to tell you –

MS. : That is wrong.

MR. : That's wrong.

MS. : (Inaudible, cross talk) – for a single second, but at the post I used to sometimes feel like – (inaudible, cross talk).

MS. : That's a discrimination.

MS. DICKMEYER: Why is this the first thing they know about me? (Chuckles.) So anything else? So, yes.

MS. : I guess along the fear of discrimination, I don't know whether that's covered under our APO laws, and –

MS. : Yes, it is.

MS. : Well, again, it's not – are you being discriminated against or is your child being discriminated against?

MS. : Doesn't matter, I don't think, in that sense.

(Cross talk.)

MS. : Yeah, I would definitely, I would definitely. I think when you're in the Foreign Service, that wouldn't matter because you're a unit somewhere else. But it is one of the seven classes, so –

MS. : Yeah, for the child, is that the parents – (inaudible, cross talk) – special-needs child, depending on what – where in the range of special needs it is, even, for the stability versus education issue, the parent is not part of, necessarily, a protected class. And again, just about the confidentiality of our – (inaudible).

MS. : I'm not sure about that.

MS. : Whether it's special needs or it's a completely different medical issue, there is no confidentiality. And that needs it comes from the highest levels of med and even further, that that really needs to be enforced because it is not at all. We've been at country teams where the RMO announced a pregnancy of a country team member – myself – (laughter) – long before I planned on announcing that. It's not practiced.

MS. : For some reasons, overseas, I don't know why, but maybe because we have such small communities, all these kind of accepted rules here just don't really apply anymore, and you have people making inappropriate comments all the time about a range of issues. It doesn't – pregnancy, gender, all this kind of thing, and it's really quite common, and even thought the management officer doesn't have the last say on assignments, I mean, he definitely, he or she plays a big role in the hierarchy. Not surprised at all if that were something that they took into consideration.

MS. : Yeah, and it's not just money – money isn't the only thing, but there, as we pointed out, seems to be a possibility of conflict. But there's so many other special-needs issues in the bidding process that posts are a little – primarily, the possibility that your clearance could be yanked for that post makes you very unattractive to that post. I mean, it happens, I mean, either because there are changes or because there is a change of heart. Either – and I'm not just – I'm acknowledging that ECS is only one aspect of mental clearance for a child, maybe there are impending medical issues. So basically, sort of a Class II issue is a possible red flag –

MS. : A red flag?

MS. : For posts, so –

MR. : They're either going to have to curtail or be medevac-ed or something. The medevac expenses, too, I believe, mostly come from posts. But –

MS. DICKMEYER: Go ahead. So we have to wrap up in a minute, so just very –

MS. : Please continue.

MR. : I blanked for a second. (Laughter.)

MS. : It's okay. It'll come back, it'll come back.

MS. DICKMEYER: Oh, did you have one? No.



MS. : No, I was just trying to let him continue.

MS. DICKMEYER: Oh, okay. So anyway, so we do need to finish up, and is there – does anyone have any final comments? Is there – I guess, what are you walking away from today, not just – what is it that you think you want out of it, and where – I mean, just in general, tell me one thing that might – you might do as a result of being here today. Just curious, if anybody wants to share that.

No? So – yes, you have one.

MR. : You're providing information and it's timely. The nice thing is, I now know who I can talk to, and the fact that not only is it professional competency, but in your case, you have some personal experience, balances out that – (inaudible).

MS. DICKMEYER: Thank you. Anybody else? No. So, well that is – the primary goal is that I think that so much of – so many of the questions you want answered really can be answered, and I think that's what everyone wants you to know, is that we're accessible, and if we're not the right place, we really do try not to do the bureaucratic answer. (Laughter.) Give you the – give you some information and point you in the right direction. So yes?

MS. : Yeah, I was just going to say, I think next time I do re-entry, I will start with the FLO. (Laughter.)

MS. : It's like going with the flow.

MS. DICKMEYER: We're thinking of changing that. Well, thank you for your time, it's really been a pleasure. (Applause.)

(END)